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Book Reviews

Elisabeth Nathanson, *Television and postfeminist housekeeping. No time for mother*, Routledge: New York, 2013; 205 pp. ISBN 13: 978-0-415-81139-2

Television and Postfeminist Housekeeping discusses how women have conquered organizational life by head over heels jumping into the world of work, whereas conditions for combining work and private life have hardly been altered in the process. This becomes particularly clear by choosing a perspective of time complexity to look at gendered divisions of household tasks; and it is enhanced by the repetitions and framing of 'the world of work and home' through television programmes and other media representations. This implies that the combination of women's professional lives with whatever it means to have a private life is increasingly difficult, while at the same time, postfeminist conditions (implying that feminism is a thing of the past) render debates in terms of exclusion based on gender obsolete. From *Desperate Housewives* to *Sex in the City*, from *Supernanny* to *Lets Knit2gether*, a glut of media-driven programmes symbolizes patterns of household activities (and assumed duties) as increasingly influenced by work-related temporalities, or contrasting those in terms of chaos, mess, dirt and repetitive action. Some programmes mock traditional roles, others seemingly 'help' in processes of coping with household tasks and duties. Overall, as Elisabeth Nathanson argues, women become responsible for '*re-clocking* the home' (p. 21, italics added IS), which at least hints at less revolutionary change in terms of gender relations than the term 'postfeminist' would convey.

In the introduction, the author sets out presenting postfeminism as a marker of how women's roles are being debated, or not. Postfeminism is deconstructed as a temporal term (post-), implying that we are beyond feminist discussions—but this may impede insight in what feminism has not brought about yet. In this logic, television shows and programmes may well serve to soothe public opinion about unforeseen consequences of postfeminism more in general: with increased availability of household technologies, household services and a decline of the importance of 'doing housework', traditional debates over gendered tasks seem superfluous. At the same time, television and other media keep producing programmes that by their very nature focus on 'who should do what', and increasingly

also 'how': in terms of sequencing, guarding continuity, pacing and efficiency. The latter of course feeds into the healing quality of home makeovers, gardening design advice and cooking shows. What these programmes and other media more or less explicitly do is constructing images of women's time: either in terms of women as world champions of the ongoing juggling act between kitchen, children and home-design, or by presenting women as continuously failing to meet those expectations, which of course also confirms the always-busy image. 'Popular culture depicts successful femininity as distinct from older generations of women through a rhetoric of individuality, freedom and consumer choice, but this rhetoric works to contain, not to liberate women' (p. 7).

How this rhetoric seemingly brings about solutions for women's time struggles is elaborated in five chapters, followed by an epilogue in which the men come in. Because, obviously, the everyday struggle of both bringing in the money and assuring that life goes on has triggered men to gradually take their share. All chapters of the book entail an in-depth exploration of the narratives and discourses related to different realms of home activities (work and leisure) and reconstruct the inherently gendered patterns therein through a temporal lens. Thus, we as readers embark on a rollercoaster ride through maintenance of the home or household work, domestic time management, multitasking or juggling with work and (nicely prescribed) leisure activities, a discussion of leisure and crafts as providing underlying rhythms, reflections on biological times including pregnancy and childbirth, and emerging ambiguities through the changing role of fathers.

In the first chapter, we meet the everyday times of (disordered) households and ways to overcome the chaos by home design (*Extreme Makeover, Home Made Easy, a.o.*) and a focus on cleaning (*Clean Sweep, How Clean is Your Home*). Entailed here is a discussion about *what dirt is*—as a reminder of the cultural dimension of dirt-as-framed and, therefore, always pointing to what we accept as clean as well as who's duty it is to 'do something about it'. This parallels the work of Schwarz-Cowan (1989): technology is nice, but does not really 'save time', at least not for those responsible for the household. Moreover, systems promoted as cleaning technologies have a certain agency themselves: cleaning technology is highly related to the consumer society and although marketing suggests that we save time, technologies have their *Eigenzeiten*, or inherent system times, that sometimes only shift temporalities to other realms, putting across the image of saving time, while actually tasks are fragmented, or change in appearance but not in time spent.

In Chapter 2, we turn to the management of the daily household rhythms underlying those of work and enabling life outside the home in the first

place. Of course, cooking and having dinner (together or not) is a cultural marker of how ''home'' is shaped and represented, often dependent on and in conflict with the rhythms of work. Here, the author analyses the historical dimension of programmes dealing with cooking and cleaning by reminding us of traditions in TV shows and media formulas in which problems with combining home and work are played out (Lucille Ball's shows, Julia Child's *The French Chef*), ultimately leading up to television networks solely devoted to cooking and household work, and making the household 'management' differently important by, for instance, turning the issues of cooking from help into a *lifestyle gadget*. Though household time is inherently cyclical, linear time is promoted as helpful for household efficiency: linear time is understood as better manageable and is associated with masculinity (p. 50). This leads to programmes like *30 Minute Meals* that ultimately expose the relationship between the worlds of work and home as ambivalent, permeable—and not easily confined to either a nostalgic home, or a market-inspired site of (re)production. The importance of domesticity is stressed by programmes that bring to the fore the importance of the rhythms of everyday life, the importance for children to have 'good meals' during the day. These kinds of programmes also expose household management as a matter of class (p. 75).

This leads to the investigation in Chapter 3 of household work in terms of multitasking: childcare, time management and women's leisure have to be balanced out. Examples from commercials that, obviously, represent a desired picture of what men and women should do to become happy members of society: e.g. car commercials showing how careers could be combined with household duties including childcare (p. 80) in order to enjoy freedom. Here, apart from women who opt out from careers in order to follow their 'choice' of living in a perfect suburban home, we enter the realm of childcare and raising children with examples from *Supernanny*, a flood of magazines, and concomitant websites (*Baby*, *Parenting*, *Ladies Home Journal*) that offer help in the complex task of parenting. Implicitly then, in focusing on a female audience, parenting is confirmed as a women's issue. In terms of time and temporality, the content of magazines and websites promotes time management to cope with work in business worlds: scheduling, planning, developing efficiency in coping (well) with all requirements. This implies an ultimately rational control over the private sphere, while paradoxically, it is continuously stressed that the spheres are different and should be kept apart as life world realms.

But what about the promised freedom, of choice, task and leisure? Chapter 4 takes us along domestic crafts and free time, partly symbolized by 'Grandma's retro style'. Here, cyclicality, i.e. repetition, ongoing activity, comes into the picture also for demarking homework from business

worlds, opening a view on alternatives for stress and insecurity derived from the world of work. We are confronted with the concept of 'aesthetics of domestic labour' (p. 103), with a twofold flavour of this type of work for 'filling spare time' as well as re-enabling rhythms that sustain 'doing time' (p. 128 ff). It is highly questionable, according to Nathanson, if this image of inner, private time use is one of liberation (by returning to assumed quality time of the home) or if we face a new time bind in that the media representations of nostalgia related to cosiness and time-at-home forebodes a retreat to the home from which it is hard to escape.

In Chapter 5, one of the most prominent achievements of the feminist movements, control over pregnancy and birth, is discussed via *thirty something*, *Desperate Housewives*, and some of the series in which the ambiguous position of women as (non)mothers now features. A twofold effect emerges: becoming parents is either totally unexpected or totally planned, with all hilarious scenes that surround it. Ultimately, the biological clock of women is depicted as linear, with the paradoxical effect of women rendered helpless to control their bodies and time, and with pregnancy and birth as the ultimate occasions for disaster and labour in the double meaning of the term.

In sum, *Television and Postfeminist Housekeeping* indeed provides a dearth of mainly US-based television and media examples of how household tasks stress the importance of not taking postfeminism literally as 'past the demands of feminism'. The discursive analyses of TV and media, densely depicted page after page, serve as both reflections of and guidelines for an understanding of household activities as genuinely gendered and temporally pressured. Therewith Elisabeth Nathanson exposes, or deconstructs, media imaging as largely confirming traditional gender roles, paradoxically linked to freedom of choice and to quite different temporalities than clock time only. The book offers a mirror view of the seemingly innocent entertainment brought to us in an inescapable manner via the 'time shortages that plague contemporary domestic life' (p. 157). Therewith, the book is a logical follow-up to the works of Schwarz-Cowan (1989), Adam (1994) and Biesecker and Hofmeister (2010) in that it stresses the importance of not leaving out temporal–spatial interrelations when analysing the gendered nature of re/production. It would be worthwhile to expand the books scope into other cultural realms, outside USA, and also in terms of class relations, as these seem a fundamental undercurrent in the analysis. Who's kitchen is meant as a site of domesticity? And with what effects for which household and family relations? Already looking forward to a sequel in domestic time–space relations, we may even anticipate *A Cyborg Home* eventually to solve the problem of no time for mother.

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Marc Augé, *The future*, trans. John Howe, Verso: London and New York, 2014; 112pp. ISBN 978-1-78-168566-2

Anyone who enjoys literature, has a passing interest in anthropology and philosophy and is concerned about the social problems of the contemporary world will find Augé's latest book a rewarding and thought-provoking read. It is in the form of an extended essay; a short book, yet traversing considerable territory. It is published in the Verso Futures series that investigates the outer limits of social and political possibilities. Augé is an anthropologist, ethnographer and cultural theorist who writes with an eclectic style. His essay is a mélange of literary, anthropological, philosophical and cultural observations with the unifying theme of reopening the future that has been closed off and limited by the social effects of globalization. Augé understands globalization as the dual phenomenon of the world market with the circulation of communication networks as well as the increased awareness of ecological and social realms as connected globally. These conditions are also creating new solidarities and new departures from what has become the current reality of market domination of society.

Augé asks, 'What happened to the future?' In doing so, he is concerned with the future of humanity and the future of the individual. These futures are problematic and intertwined. The future of the individual always has a social dimension; there is no solitary individual outside society even when the promise of a better future for many has ended in the dead-end of social